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Avro Anson Mk. I K.6183
No. 206 Squadron

THE LAST FLIGHT OF:

ANSON N.9817

A narrative of the last flight of Anson N.9817, from R.A.F. Chivenor, which crashed near Barnstaple on 15 May 1941. The two pilots were killed, Sgts ROSE and McGUFFIE, as was a road worker on the ground, Mr Sidney PRATT.

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The Last Flight of Anson W.9817

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Introduction

Flying an aircraft can be exciting and exhilarating, but it is an unforgiving activity, with one small mistake by the pilot resulting in a crash, and possibly serious injury or death. For many of the young men given the opportunity to experience the freedom of flying, the temptation to have fun, bend the rules, or push your own abilities, can be overwhelming. There have been several accounts of pilots flying under the Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol, or beating up their family's or girlfriend's home address, to give just a couple of examples.

On 15 May 1941, two young pilots under training at R.A.F. Chivenor went beyond the boundaries of their authorised flight plan, and practiced aerobatics over the northern outskirts of the town of Barnstaple in North Devon. They got it wrong, and stalled the aircraft, resulting in it crashing to the ground at Westaway Cross, Pilton, Barnstaple. Not only did they lose their lives in consequence of their actions, but the crash claimed the life of a road worker innocently repairing the road at this location. This is their story.

The Avro Anson

The Avro Anson became known within the Royal Air Force as 'Faithful Annie', in view of its long and distinguished service with the R.A.F. throughout the Second World War and beyond. The military version of the aircraft was developed from a civil version designed for Imperial Airways. It was designed by Roy CHADWICK (who later designed the Lancaster bomber) as the Type 652. It was a low wing monoplane, fitted with two Armstrong Whitworth Cheetah Mk. V engines, giving it a cruising speed of 150 mph, and a range of 600 miles. The first two aircraft flew on 7 January 1935, fitted with an improved mark of Cheetah engine, and with an all-up weight of 7,500 lbs. The two aircraft were delivered to Imperial Airways, who used them on the Croydon to Brindisi route.

Meanwhile, the U.K. government had commenced a rearmament programme to meet the threat being posed by Germany's increasing military presence in Europe. In May 1934, the Air Ministry issued a requirement for a twin-engine landplane to be used on maritime reconnaissance, and to address the perceived threat from German submarines in the event of war.

Avro were one of fifteen firms to submit bids to the Air Ministry, and with their modern design, they were awarded the contract for the Avro 652A. The first flight of the military version took place on 24 March 1935, in competition with the De Havilland Rapide biplane. The Avro design, fitted with a turret, outclassed the De Havilland design, so on 27 August 1935, the Air Ministry placed a contract with Avro for one-hundred and seventy-four aircraft, now called the Anson.

The first production aircraft, K.6152, was flown at Woodford in Lancashire (the home of Avro) on 31 December 1935, and the first Ansons entered R.A.F. service at R.A.F. Manston in Kent with No. 48 (General Reconnaissance) Squadron on 6 March 1936. It had two firsts, as the first monoplane in R.A.F. service, and the first aircraft fitted with a retractable undercarriage.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, the Anson equipped six R.A.F. squadrons:

- No. 48 Squadron now at Thorney Island, Sussex,
- No. 206 Squadron at R.A.F. Bircham Newton, Norfolk,
- No. 217 Squadron at R.A.F. Warmwell, Dorset,
- No. 220 Squadron at R.A.F. Thornaby, North Yorkshire,
- No. 223 Squadron at R.A.F. Leuchars, Fife,
- No. 269 Squadron at R.A.F. Montrose, Angus.

In addition to the six Regular squadrons of the Royal Air Force, the Anson equipped four squadrons of the Auxiliary Air Force, in effect the part-time reserve, or Territorial element, of the R.A.F. The four squadrons were:

- No. 500 (County of Kent) Squadron, at R.A.F. Detling, Kent,
- No. 502 (Ulster) Squadron, at R.A.F. Aldergrove, County Antrim,
- No. 608 (North Riding) Squadron, at R.A.F. Thornaby, North Yorkshire,
- No. 612 (County of Aberdeen) Squadron, at R.A.F. Dyce, Aberdeenshire.

Although, at this time, the Anson was primarily an operational aircraft, it also equipped the School of General Reconnaissance at R.A.F. Thorney Island, and the No. 1 Coast Artillery Cooperation Unit at R.A.F. Gosport, the former being in Sussex and the latter in Hampshire.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, despite being the most modern aircraft in the R.A.F. at the time of its inception, just three and half years later, the Anson was approaching obsolescence. Coastal Command were beginning to receive deliveries of the Lockheed Hudson from the U.S.A., another passenger aircraft modified for military use. These were purchased by the R.A.F. following a trade mission to the U.S.A. just prior to the war. No. 224 Squadron at R.A.F. Leuchars commenced receiving Hudson aircraft in August 1939, but deliveries were slow.

The Hudson was superior to the Anson as more powerful engines were fitted, giving greater speed and a longer range. In addition, it could carry a bigger bomb load, as early actions confirmed that the small bomb load of the Anson was ineffective against U-boats and surface vessels. In spite of its increasing obsolescence, the Anson remained in front line service until December 1941.

Meanwhile, the use of the Anson for training purposes was being recognised. Its large, glazed cabin was ideal for navigator, wireless operator, and air gunner training. More Ansons were built as the war progressed, including 1,528 that were shipped to Canada. When production of the Anson ceased in May 1952, 8,138 aircraft had been built in the U.K., with a further 2,882 built in Canada. The Anson did not retire officially from R.A.F. service until 28 June 1968.

R.A.F. Chivenor, and No. 3 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit

Opened at R.A.F. Chivenor in North Devon on 27 November 1940, this O.T.U. took on the responsibility for training Beaufort crews in torpedo and bombing sorties. The intention was for No. 3 (C) O.T.U. to move towards training crews for the increasing number of Whitley and Wellington aircraft being used by Coastal Command, with a new No. 5 (C) O.T.U. opening at R.A.F. Turnberry in Scotland to train the Beaufort crews. Delays in the completion of R.A.F. Turnberry led to a change of plan, with No. 3 (C) O.T.U. being redesignated as No. 5 (C) O.T.U. on 1 August 1941, to remain training personnel on the Beauforts, while a new No. 3 (C) O.T.U. opened at R.A.F. Cranwell on 29 July 1941 to train Whitley and Wellington crews for Coastal Command.

The North Devon Airfield was officially opened in April 1934 and comprised a large grass field of about 300 yards by 200 yards and a clubhouse and workshop buildings. The field was situated roughly where the officer's married quarters now stand, and the airport buildings were erected immediately to the south of the Barnstaple – Braunton railway line some 300 yards east of the Duckpool level crossing.

When the U.K. and France declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939, the Air Ministry closed the airfield under emergency Regulations, and then requisitioned the site. Although the Air Ministry requisitioned North Devon Airport immediately after the outbreak of the war, the Royal Air Force did not use the site until 1940. As originally developed, Royal Air Force Chivenor had the same boundaries on the North, South and West as it has now, but the Eastern boundary was a lane which ran South through Chivenor village to the River Taw. This land belonged to Sir William WILLIAMS and was farmed by the REED brothers of Chivenor Farm, which was in the village, and Marsh Farm, which stood roughly in the centre of the triangle formed by the present runways.

After the usual Devon hedgerows and earth banks between the fields had been removed and two streams flowing southwards across the site had been culverted, the Air Ministry Works Directorate moved in, under the direction of Mr. L. DOWNS, who in 1959 completed 19 years' service as Clerk of Works at Chivenor. The first building work started in May 1940, on the officers' lines, and on 21 June 1940, the first sod was removed to inaugurate work on the runways. The initial plans provided for three runways, each one-thousand yards long and fifty yards wide, on the alignment of the present runway layout.

The building plans when completed left the Station virtually as it is today, the only major later additions being the two airman's brick barrack blocks and the married quarters. The eastern boundary of the airfield was extended in 1941 to take in the North Devon Airport, and between then and 1944 the east-west runway was progressively lengthened to its present two-thousand yards. The first Royal Air Force unit to occupy the Station was No. 3 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit, administered by No. 17 Group, Coastal Command.

Flight Lieutenant (F/L) E. D. BRADFIELD arrived on Friday, 25 October 1940, from R.A.F. Mount Batten in Plymouth to take up the position of Senior Equipment Officer, accompanied by Pilot Officer (P/O) A. C. SHARPE, who was posted from R.A.F. Gosport as an Equipment Officer on the same day. These two officers were the first personnel to be posted to the new R.A.F. Chivenor, to establish the new Operational Training Unit there. The next day, Flying Officer (F/O) J. E. CAMPBELL arrived from Headquarters, 15 Group, to assume the appointment of Station Administration Officer, for which he received promotion to the rank of Acting Flight Lieutenant.

Wing Commander (W/C) M. V. RIDGEWAY came from Headquarters No. 15 Group to become the first Station Commander on Monday, 28 October 1940. At the end of October, the strength of R.A.F. Chivenor was four officers, and twenty other ranks. The next key arrivals were P/O A. S. PINE-COFFIN and P/O T. M. CHADWICK, who arrived on 4 November 1940; the former from R.A.F. Heston as Adjutant, and the latter from R.A.F. Loughborough as Assistant Adjutant. Two more arrivals came on 6 November, Squadron Leader (S/L) F. R. OFFORD from the Air Ministry to assume the duties of Station Headquarters Officer, and P/O C. G. RICKARDS from No. 1 Maintenance Unit at Kidbrooke. F/L A. D. CLEUGH-FAIR was the first flying appointment, arriving on 9 November from R.A.F. Gosport for Flying Instructor duties. The first W.A.A.F. appointment was Assistant Section Officer (A/S/O) M. E. WILLIAMSON, who arrived from Leighton Buzzard on 11 November for C. & C. duties. F/O H. W. GILL arrived on 14 November, on being posted from No. 1 (C) O.T.U. at R.A.F. Silloth for Signal Duties.

On 17 November 1940, the build-up of the new R.A.F. station continued with the appointment of F/L T. A. HUNT from No. 13 M.U. at R.A.F. Henlow as the new Station Medical Officer. On this date, the formal notification came through that No. 3 (C) O.T.U. was to be formed in accordance with temporary establishment WAR/CC/166. F/O H. THOMAS was posted on 20 November to assume the duties of Station Adjutant and with that came promotion to the rank of Acting Flight Lieutenant. A plaintive note in the O.R.B. on 21 November records that, *'a party of seventy-seven airmen arrived on posting to his unit today without any previous warning'*. On 22 November, F/L N. L. CLAXTON reported from R.A.F. Ringway near Manchester to take up duties as Station Engineering Officer, and on the same day, the Deputy Principal Medical Officer (Hygiene) of Coastal Command, Group Captain (G/C) KEANE undertook an inspection of the medical facilities at the station.

On 27 November, the unit's first aircraft arrived from No. 1 (C) O.T.U. at R.A.F. Silloth, with their pilots and crew on attachment for flying duties. The Bristol Beaufort Mk I aircraft were:

1. L.4498 – F/L D. B. M. WRIGHT and four crew;
2. L.9905 – P/O J. F. PERCIVAL and three crew;
3. L.9932 – Sgt J. BLATCHFORD and three crew;
4. L.9949 – F/L G. H. B. HUTCHINSON and three crew;
5. L.9952 – S/L A. T. NAISH and three crew.

On Thursday 28 November, five Avro Anson aircraft arrived from No. 1 (C) O.T.U. flown by officers who were on attachment to R.A.F. Chivenor for flying duties.

These aircraft were:

1. N.9634 – F/O R. P. J. RADBOURNE;
2. N.9641 – P/O B. J. KLECHA;
3. N.9679 – P/O J. POLNIK;
4. N.9726 – P/O F. JAKUSZ-GOSTOMSKI;¹
5. N.9891 – S/L J. W. BUCHANAN.

Three of these pilots were Polish, who had arrived in the U.K. and joined the Royal Air Force, although remaining members of the Polish Air Force. Friday, 29 November 1940, saw further moves in establishing the structure of the new base and operational training unit. F/L G. C. WALKER was appointed Chief Flying Instructor, and F/L A. D. CLEUGH-FAIR appointed Chief Ground Instructor. S/L A. T. NAISH was appointed to command 'A' Flight, with S/L J. W. BUCHANAN commanding 'B' Flight.

On Saturday, 30 November, another twenty-one airmen arrived, making the strength of No. 3 (C) O.T.U. forty officers, one W.A.A.F. officer, forty-four senior non-commissioned officers, and five-hundred and fifty airmen. Of these, four-hundred and fifty-two airmen were living on camp, with all the officers and the remainder of the airmen living in billets in the Braunton and Barnstaple districts. The accommodation for the officers and senior non-commissioned officers had not been built by this date, and the development of the station was still very much work in progress. Yet, it was on this date that conversion instruction of pilots to Beauforts and Ansons commenced at R.A.F. Chivenor, the first military use of the new airfield.

The first operational squadron at Chivenor was No. 252 Squadron, equipped with Beaufighters, and initially some Blenheims. On 4 December 1940, S/L R. G. YAXLEY reported from Headquarters Coastal Command with instructions to form this squadron at Chivenor.² The next day, F/L J. M. LOCKYER, F/O. W. H. KING, P/O R. W. HURST, and Sub. Lieut. K. HOLME, R.N., arrived at R.A.F. Chivenor for duties with No. 252 Squadron.³

On 11 December, two more aircraft and pilots arrived to join No. 3 (C) O.T.U., both Ansons coming from No. 1 (C) O.T.U. at R.A.F. Silloth:

1. K.6226 – F/O W. BERINGER;
2. N.4954 – Sgt Jozef ARMANOWSKI, P.A.F.

On Friday, 13 December, two Fairey Battle aircraft arrived by air from No. 1 (C) O.T.U. at R.A.F. Silloth, with their pilots, for flying duties at R.A.F. Chivenor. The R.A.F. was using Battles at this time for gunnery training and target towing.

¹ In the O.R.B., his name is spelt as JAKURR-GOSTOMSKI

² Some sources give the official date of formation of No. 252 Squadron as 21 November 1940, but these dates are taken from the R.A.F. Chivenor Operational Record Book.

³ It appears at least three of these four men survived the Second World War. A P/O 88706 Walter Hargeaves KING, died on 19 July 1941 while serving as a pilot with No. 254 Squadron, a Coastal Command unit equipped with Blenheims. He is buried in Row J. Grave 1., of the Sanderstead Churchyard Extension.

The two aircraft were:

1. L.5691 – Sgt KUBACHI;⁴
2. L.5771 – F/L D. W. S. IRELAND.

On Monday, 23 December 1940, R.A.F. Chivenor and No. 3 (C) O.T.U. suffered its first fatal air crash. 745212 Sgt James BLATCHFORD had arrived at R.A.F. Chivenor from R.A.F. Silloth on 27 November, with his crew of three, flying Beaufort L.9932. That evening, Sgt BLATCHFORD took off in Beaufort L.9943, together with 907094 LAC GREENWOOD, for a night flying training sortie. The aircraft crashed soon after take-off, killing Sgt BLATCHFORD, and seriously injuring LAC GREENWOOD. The aircraft was destroyed.⁵

Additional personnel continued to arrive at R.A.F. Chivenor, as the base developed towards its full commitment as a training base for Beaufort aircrew. On 21 December, W/O A. E. LOVELL arrived from R.A.F. Binbrook to take over the duties of Station Warrant Officer from W/O J. H. HODGE. He left on 30 December, transferring to No. 4 Squadron at York. On the station's first Christmas Day, six-hundred and ten airmen, and thirty-four soldiers of the 10th Bn. The Royal Berkshire Regt. (attached for airfield defence duties) were served with a Christmas dinner of turkey and Christmas pudding by the officers and senior non-commissioned officers. Until the end of 1940, the domestic arrangements were complicated by the fact that neither the Officers' nor the Sergeants' messes had been completed, and all the officers and senior non-commissioned officers had to be billeted out. On 26 December, the Officers' Mess was opened for luncheons, a sign that progress was being made. A major event in the history of R.A.F. Chivenor occurred on 30 December 1940, when twenty pilots of No. 42 Squadron arrived to undertake a conversion course on Bristol Beauforts. The actual course commenced the next day.

The end of the year saw the strength of R.A.F. Chivenor, including the operational training unit, as seventy-nine officers, three W.A.A.F. officers, one-hundred senior non-commissioned officers, and seven-hundred and forty-six airmen. Of these, seven-hundred and thirteen non-commissioned officers and airmen lived on the base, all the others were living in billets in the Braunton and Barnstaple districts.

The construction programme for R.A.F. Chivenor was reaching its conclusion, marked by the opening of the Officers' Mess on 3 January 1941, and the Sergeants' Mess the next day. These were wooden huts, as were most of the buildings (other than the hangers) at R.A.F. Chivenor. W/C RIDGEWAY and thirty-one officers moved into the Officers' Mess, and eighty-nine senior non-commissioned officers into the Sergeants' Mess from billets around the locality.

⁴ Sgt KUBACHI is probably Maksymilian KUBACKI, who had the service number 780412. He was born on 7 May 1914, and served throughout the war, ending with the rank of F/L. He served for a time with No. 300 (Polish) Squadron, and was awarded the D.F.C.. He died on 26 May 2007 in Warsaw, Poland.

⁵ Form 540 ORB November 1940 AIR

On Monday, 13 January 1941, No. 1 Course of Instruction – Beauforts, commenced, but the number of students on this course is not recorded. It was to conclude on Sunday, 2 March 1941. These were the first students to undertake the two-month operational training course, including the formation of an aircrew of four to include a pilot, observer, and two wireless operators/air gunners. The syllabus at No. 3 (C) O.T.U. is not known, but a general indication of the nature of the course was that it comprised three stages. These were:

- Weeks 1 and 2 – Ground Instruction/Crewing Up/Familiarisation/Circuits and Landings;
- Weeks 3 to 6 – Ground Instruction/Basic Air Training Day & Night/Bombing/Air Firing/Cine Gun;
- Week 7 & onwards – Ground Instruction/Applied Air Training/Cross Country/Advanced Navigation/Fighter Affiliation.

The first element of the training programme at No. 3 (C) O.T.U. was for the pilots to be assessed by an instructor (also known as a Screened Pilot) and passed for solo flying. The instructors taught the pupil pilots to: *'Always trust your instruments'*, and not to rely on their instincts. Any conflict between a pilot's instincts and his instruments could result in special disorientation, particularly in cloud, and no doubt led to many aircraft stalling and crashing. Many pilots avoided flying in cloud unless taking evasive action for this reason. When landing, the Beaufort would be eased into the final approach, full flaps down, undercarriage down, so at about 80 knots a decent three-point landing could be achieved safely.

Once a pilot was passed as competent for flying solo, they would team up with an Observer (Navigator), and two Wireless Operators/Air Gunners. It was the practice of Coastal Command to train aircrew as wireless operators and qualified air gunners to allow flexibility in their duties, and for aircrew to interchange roles on long sorties to avoid becoming stale. The process for forming up crews was informal, with the pilots, observers and WOp/AGs all meeting up in a room, choosing their crews by discussions and then an instinctive decision.

The next stage for the crews was for the pilots to qualify for night flying. Many did their first sorties at dusk, before being passed for solo flying. It should be remembered that the aircraft of this period lacked many of the sophisticated flying aids fitted to modern aircraft. Most pilots relied on their experience, judgement and luck.

The O.T.U. course included navigation, bombing and air-combat exercises, with one of the last elements being formation flying. This was because the anti-shipping aircraft would usually fly and attack in 'vics' of three aircraft, so this skill had to be learnt. Once the training programme was completed, the course would be concluded, and the crews posted. Most crews were posted as formed crews, although some would be split up according to operational requirements. Some crews were posted direct to either No. 22, 42, 86, or 217 Squadrons, the four Beaufort equipped squadrons in Coastal Command at this time. Other crews were posted to the Torpedo Training Unit at R.A.F. Abbotsinch, near Glasgow.

Elements of the training syllabus at No. 3 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit included:

- Synthetic training:
 - Link Trainer;
 - Bombing Teacher;
 - Clay Pigeon Shooting;
 - Turret Training;
- Gunnery:
 - Combat Manoeuvres;
 - Air-to-Sea Firing;
 - Air-to-Air Firing;
 - Fighter Affiliation;
- Bombing:
 - Bombing Target Practice;
 - Mine Laying;
- Navigation:
 - Dead Reckoning Navigation;
 - Cross-Country Navigation Exercises;
 - Cross-Sea Navigation Exercises;
- Drills:
 - Ditching and Dinghy;
 - Parachute;
 - Fire;
 - Crash;
- Operational Procedures:
 - Formation Flying;
 - Attack Profiles.

On 16 January, a revised Establishment was issued for R.A.F. Chivenor and No. 3 (C) O.T.U. from Headquarters, Coastal Command. This showed a considerable increase in personnel to be stationed at R.A.F. Chivenor. With the increase in the Establishment, the status of the Commanding Officer was raised with the posting of G/C J. H. SADLER from No. 9 Air Crew Selection Board to command R.A.F. Chivenor. In addition, another ninety-four airmen arrived on being posted to the base. A key arrival was that of F/L S. M. BOAL, known as 'Sammy' BOAL, an experienced pilot who was posted from R.A.F. St. Eval for flying duties as an instructor at the O.T.U.. The change in command took place on Thursday, 23 January, when G/C J. H. SADLER took over command of the station from W/C M. V. RIDGEWAY. W/C RIDGEWAY signed off the Operations Record Book for the last time as Commanding Officer, and assumed his new appointment as Chief Instructor at No. 3 (C) O.T.U.. S/L G. C. WALKER became the Chief Ground Instructor at the O.T.U..

On 30 January, S/L H. E. R. NELSON arrived from Headquarters No. 17 Group to assume the duties as Anson Flying Instructor and Commanding Officer of 'B' Flight in place of S/L BUCHANAN (with effect from 31 January), and F/L BOAL assumed command of 'A' Flight in place of S/L NAISH.

On the last day of the month, the strength of the station to sixty-six officers, three W.A.A.F. officers, two-hundred and sixteen senior non-commissioned officers, and one-thousand, four-hundred and seventy-five airmen. Of these, thirty-seven officers, one-hundred and fifty-eight senior n.c.o's., and one-thousand, three hundred and six airmen were accommodated in R.A.F. Chivenor, with the rest billeted in the Barnstaple and Braunton areas.

No. 3 (C) O.T.U. suffered its second fatality in the evening of Tuesday, 18 February 1941. That evening, at about 21.40 hours, 741895 Sgt A. H. S. EVANS took off from R.A.F. Chivenor on a solo night flying training flight in Beaufort Mk. I L.9829. The aircraft was seen to climb too steeply, it turned through 180 degrees, and then flew into a hill about one mile north of Chivenor, near Heanton Punchardon church.⁶ Sgt EVANS, the only occupant, was rescued alive, albeit seriously injured. An ambulance took him to the North Devon Infirmary in Barnstaple, where he died from his injuries the next day at 16.45 hours.⁷ An Australian serving in the Royal Air Force, his family requested that his body be taken to Cockburnspath Parish Church in Berwickshire for burial.⁸

The routine of R.A.F. Chivenor continued in spite of the second fatal crash, with heavy snow during the night of 20 February. On Sunday, 23 February, tragedy came to the base with the death from gunshot wounds of 42824 Pilot Officer M. A. ESPLIN. Malcolm Alexander ESPLIN was a member of the Royal Air Force, who was granted a short service commission of four years on the active list with effect from 23 October 1939, with the rank of Acting Pilot Officer.⁹ He was promoted to the rank of Pilot Officer, on probation, with effect from 25 May 1940.¹⁰ At the time of his death, he was twenty-five years' of age, and a son of Alexander and Eva C. ESPLIN. He was buried in Grave 5587 of Section R Nonconformist, of the Southport (Duke Street) Cemetery.¹¹

Monday, 24 February 1941, was to bring further tragedy to R.A.F. Chivenor with the third fatal aircraft crash since the opening of the base. This was just six days after the crash that ultimately claimed the life of Sgt A. H. S. EVANS. At 20.20 hours, P/O H. MUNDY crashed while night flying, with the aircraft bursting into flames, killing the pilot and sole occupant. He was flying Beaufort L.9858, which was one of those delivered from R.A.F. Abbotsinch in January. The aircraft dived into the ground at Braunton Great Field, close to the airfield, for an unknown reason. Herbert MUNDY, who was known as Bob, was a South African from Durban. He was buried with full military honours in the afternoon of 1 March 1941, at St. Augustine's Church, Heanton Punchardon, on the high ground overlooking R.A.F. Chivenor.

⁶ The Operations Record Book (AIR 28/152), describes the location of the crash as '*near Chivenor Church*'. There is not church at Chivenor, so it is assumed to mean the Parish Church at Heanton Punchardon, just above R.A.F. Chivenor. The O.R.B. records his name as Sgt H. S. EVANS,

⁷ See: <https://www.awm.gov.au/people/rolls/R2094483/> and AIR 28/152

⁸ See: <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2812310/EVANS,%20ANDREW%20HAROLD%20SARGENT>

⁹ See: <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/34727/page/7500>

¹⁰ See: <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/34898/page/4363>

¹¹ See: <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2700549/ESPLIN,%20MALCOLM%20ALEXANDER>

With a total strength of almost one-thousand, eight-hundred personnel now based at R.A.F. Chivenor, concern was raised about the possibility of the unit suffering heavy casualties in the event of such an enemy air attack developing, and so one-hundred and fifty airmen, and soldiers, from the station were provided with dispersed sleeping quarters off the station. Wrafton Rectory, Chivenor Cottage, St. Brannock's Hall and the Masonic Hall, Braunton were all requisitioned by the Air Ministry to provide this dispersed accommodation.

March 1941 started routinely, with the training programme for No. 1 Course continuing in spite of the loss of two pilots, with various movements to and from R.A.F. Chivenor. On 1 March, G/C R. B. MAYCOCK, the Senior Air Staff Officer for No. 17 Group made an informal visit to the station. By now, No. 3 (C) O.T.U. at R.A.F. Chivenor comprised:

'A' Flt.	Beaufort
'B' Flt.	Beaufort
'C' Flt.	Anson, Blenheim
'D' Flt.	Anson, Blenheim
'F' Flt	Battle (For target towing)

No. 1 Beaufort Course finished on 2 March, although the next destination of the aircrew concerned is not recorded. The funeral service for P/O MUNDY was held on 1 March, at St. Augustine's Church, at Heanton Punchardon, overlooking the airfield. W/O LOVELL, R.A.F. Chivenor's senior non-commissioned officer and Station Warrant Officer, paraded the funeral party at 14.30 hours at the Station Headquarters, from where the cortege left, with the coffin on a lorry, and an honour guard either side of the lorry. At the church, other aircrew acted as bearers to take the coffin into the church, after which MUNDY was buried with full military honours in the churchyard.

On 3 March, the day was notable for the crash of a German Heinkel 111 bomber on Lundy Island. The crew survived and set fire to the aircraft, to be arrested by Mr. VANOS, who was presumably the warden on the island. The German aircrew were collected and brought to the mainland for interrogation. The next day, there was a minor accident when S/L F. T. KELLY swung on take-off in Beaufort L.00460, damaging it slightly.¹² There were three incidents on 6 March, started by W/C W. C. BOWEN slightly damaged Beaufort L.1043 when the aircraft swung on landing. Sgt N. T. LAWRENCE overshot the runway and crashed into a hedge, badly damaging Anson N.9772, but fortunately the aircrew were uninjured. P/O J. E. LINGARD damaged Beaufighter R.2198 when it swung on landing, but again the aircrew were uninjured.

On 9 March 1941, P/O J. F. PERCIVAL badly damaged another Beaufort, L.9948, when his aircraft swung on landing, while he was giving dual instruction. Again, the aircrew were uninjured. That day, two aircraft hangers were blacked out so that work on repairing aircraft could be carried out at night. The next day, W/C L. W. C. BOWER crashed on landing in Beaufort L.4459, slightly damaging the undercarriage. The aircrew were uninjured.

¹² The aircraft registration number contained in the ORB is incorrect and does not exist.

There was another tragedy on 13 March, when Blenheim V.6098 crashed en-route from R.A.F. Chivenor to R.A.F. St. Athan in South Wales. The aircraft was destroyed, killing F/O A. GRIENTHWAITE, F/O HITCH and Sgt T. DYKES. All three had been posted to join the embryonic No. 252 Squadron, then forming at R.A.F. Chivenor with Bristol Beaufighters. On 15 March, an Air Raid message Code Red was issued at 00.02 hours, with the All Clear issued at 02.25 hours. There was another non-fatal incident on 17 March when P/O I. G. MITCHELL crashed on landing in Beaufort L.4482, without any injuries being reported. On 19 March, the nature of training aircrew was highlighted by another non-fatal accident, when P/O J. O. H. WILLING on taking off in Beaufort L00460 (sic) swung the aircraft badly damaging the undercarriage.¹³ There were no casualties. On 19 March, S/L G. C. WALKER took over command of 'D' Flight, and W/C G. K. FAIRTLOUGH was posted to R.A.F. from No. 15 Group.

On 26 March, a fatal air crash occurred that claimed the lives of 748687 Sgt D. O. DRAPER, and 905175 Sgt J. A. SIMPSON. They were flying Anson N.9676 over Barnstaple Bay, when their aircraft entered a steep turn at a height of 800' and plunged into the sea. Another pilot from R.A.F. Chivenor witnessed this incident, and he reported it to base. No trace of the two aircrew was found, so they were reported 'Missing, believed Killed'. All was quiet on 27 March, but on 28 March, R.A.F. Chivenor suffered its greatest loss of life in a single incident, when Anson L.9150 crashed into a hillside on Halsinger Down and was burnt out. The pilot was 780417 Sgt K. KLYSZCZ, a Polish airman who had escaped from his country when it was invaded. The four wireless operators under training who were on board were: 1164981 Sgt E. R. DEVEREUX, 964251 Sgt A. J. CHEETHAM, 1164188 Sgt D. STOCKTON, and 1325102 Sgt R. J. MAY. All five men were killed instantly. At first, it was thought that the Anson had been lost due to enemy action, but it was attributed later to structural failure. The reason why enemy action may have been suspected to be responsible for the loss of L.9150 was that there were two Air Raid warnings on that day, the first between 10.10 and 10.46 hours, and the second between 14.01 and 15.46 hours.

On 30 March, No. 2 Beaufort Course and No. 2 Anson Course both finished on this date, and No. 4 Beaufort, and No. 4 Anson courses, commenced on 31 March 1941. On 30 March, an Air Raid Message Red was in force between 11.55 and 12.20 hours on 30 March, and another Message Red was declared at 20.22 hours on 31 March. This time it was for real, in fact, the Red warning was not received until five minutes after the attack. There were only two aircraft involved. They appeared over Braunton at a low altitude, flying south. They then circled left and attacked the aerodrome from the southern end.

The first aircraft, believed to be a Heinkel 111 dropped sticks of high explosive and incendiaries bombs on the airfield in a north-north-easterly direction, finishing at the Control Tower. A few of the incendiary bombs ignited, but only three of the high explosive bombs exploded, probably due to the low height of the German aircraft not allowing the bombs time to fuse.

¹³ There are two references in the ORB to a Beaufort L00460, which must be inaccurate. This aircraft registration number was never issued, so it is probable that this refers to L.4460, a Beaufort that was based at No. 3 (C) O.T.U. at Chivenor for a period.

This aircraft stopped bombing until it reached the railway line, where another stick of twelve bombs were dropped. The first bomb of this stick hit the railway line, damaging both the Up and Down tracks. The remaining eleven bombs landed in open country. All of these twelve bombs exploded. The aircraft pulled up and departed over Heanton Hill. The second German aircraft, believed to be a Junkers 88, came in very close behind the first aircraft, and took a more easterly course, crossing the track of the first bomber near the Control Tower. This aircraft dropped the first stick of bombs, and machine gunned the airfield. The second stick was aimed at the railway line, and damaged one track. Another bomb landed in a building under construction, and exploded, injuring three men who were working in a wireless lorry nearby. On hearing the machine gunning, they jumped out of the lorry and took shelter behind a wall, but they were injured by falling masonry after the bomb exploded. The rest of the bombs landed in open fields outside the perimeter.

After a false alarm on 6 March, an air attack started at 20.20 hrs on 31 March, just as a 'purple' warning was being issued. The two aircraft involved appeared at low altitude over Braunton, flying southwards, and then made a turn to port and attacked the airfield from the south. A He 111 dropped a mixed load of High Explosives and Incendiaries on the airfield and railway line, and it was followed by a Ju 88 which dropped a similar load of bombs and also opened up on the buildings with machine gun fire. Of a total of forty bombs dropped, eleven failed to explode, and the only damage and injury to the unit was caused by a bomb which exploded inside a building under construction by the side of the railway line. Three men who were sheltering behind one wall of the building were hit by falling masonry and slightly injured. Because of the low altitude from which they were dropped, most of the unexploded bombs failed to penetrate the surface and were lying on the ground. It was these that caused the greatest hold-up to the activities of the station.

The month of April 1941 opened with R.A.F. Chivenor, and No. 3 (C) O.T.U. dealing with the aftermath of the German air raid the previous day. Two runways remained unserviceable, and a bomb disposal squad of one Flight Sergeant, one Sergeant, two Corporals and four Other Ranks arrived from R.A.F. Mount Batten, Turnchapel, to await the arrival of their officers the next day. The funeral took place on 2 April of 964251 Sgt A. J. CHEETHAM at St. Augustine's Churchyard, at Heanton Punchardon, one of five men who died on 28 March with the loss of Anson L.9150. There was an Air Raid Warning Red message at 21.20 hours, with the All Clear issued at 22.00 hours.

The exigencies of wartime meant that a normal flying programme took place on Easter Sunday (13 April 1941), and there was an Air Raid Warning Red in the early morning on 04.43 hours, with the All Clear at 05.13 hours.

There were two crashes on Easter Sunday. In the first, 904587 Sgt R. J. BUCKMASTER crashed in Beaufort L.4495, without any casualties resulting. The aircraft was repaired, and it continued in service at R.A.F. Chivenor. It was struck off charge after a forced-landing at R.A.F. Chivenor on 26 November 1941.

In addition, on Easter Sunday, 916773 Sgt A. GOSDEN was taking off, flying Beaufort Mk. I N.9952, when the aircraft swung, and hit a stationary lorry, which was removing a wrecked aircraft from near the runway.¹⁴ There were no casualties. Sgt Anthony GOSDEN went on to serve with No. 217 Squadron, at R.A.F. St. Eval. On Easter Monday, 14 April, a normal flying programme was run, even though there were Air Raid Warning Red alerts issued at 03.58 hours, and 22.47 hours. The first lasted until 05.25 hours, and the second until 23.15 hours. 742954 Sgt A. PATTISON crashed Anson N.9641 into crashed Beaufort L.9855 on the edge of the runway, the pilot being uninjured.¹⁵ The Anson was repaired and continued to serve at No. 5 (C) O.T.U., and other units. Two Air Raid Warning Red alerts were issued between 02.55 and 04.28 hours, and 22.58 hours and 05.04 on 16 April. R.A.F. Chivenor was attacked, commencing at 03.00 hours. All three runways were rendered unserviceable, and the Gas Clothing Store suffered serious fire damage. The airfield was unserviceable for only a short time after this attack, two runways becoming serviceable again late on 17 April.

Saturday 19 April 1941 was important as it was the start of the Barnstaple War Weapons Week. The Station Commander, G/C J. A. SADLER attended the opening ceremony, with one officer and fifty other ranks attended the War Weapons church parade, presumably at the Parish Church in Barnstaple. The second Air Raid Warning Red was issued at 21.50 hours, with the All Clear not issued until 03.00 hours on 21 April.

It is interesting to note that on 20 April 1941, Bristol Beaufort Mk. I, L.9836 ditched off the coast of North Devon, yet this is not referred to in the R.A.F. Chivenor Operations Record Book. Beaufort L.9836 had left R.A.F. Chivenor on a routine training exercise, flown by Sgt R. J. BUCKMASTER. An engine failed during the flight, so Sgt BUCKMASTER had to ditch the aircraft in the sea. He was rescued successfully. The main East to West runway was declared serviceable again on 21 April.

The Operations Record Book contains a strange entry dated 22 April 1941. It states: *'Beaufort No. L.4498 and Beaufort No. L.9955 crashed while night flying'*. Beaufort L.4498 had arrived at R.A.F. Chivenor on 27 November 1940 from No. 1 (C) O.T.U. at R.A.F. Silloth, with their pilots and crew on attachment for flying duties. This aircraft is recorded as having crashed into the sea during a night-time training sortie in the evening of 28 March 1941, having taken off from R.A.F. Chivenor. The pilot, twenty-six-year-old 742769 Sgt F. W. CORDER, was lost, with his body never being recovered. He is commemorated, therefore, on Panel 41 of the Runnymede Memorial in Surrey. He was a former civilian pilot and was married. Beaufort L.9955 had arrived from R.A.F. Abbotsinch on 15 January 1941, as one of seven aircraft delivered to R.A.F. Chivenor on that date. It is recorded that it crashed on 24 February 1941, being converted to a training airframe.

¹⁴ The serial N.9952, as quoted in the ORB for April 1941, is incorrect, as this serial was never issued to a Bristol Beaufort. The serial L.9952 was issued to a Mk. I Beaufort, one of the batch of 221 aircraft delivered between March and August 1940. This aircraft had arrived at R.A.F. Chivenor on 27 November 1940, as one of the original five Beauforts allocated to R.A.F. Chivenor. It was repaired, allocated to the No. 9 (C) O.T.U., and struck off charge on 24 August 1944. It is assumed that the 'wrecked aircraft' must relate to L.9945 above.

¹⁵ There is no mention in the O.R.B. of a crash involving Beaufort L.9855 on this date, or previously. Whether a mistake was made in the serial number, and it relates to Beaufort L.4495, is not known.

On 25 April 1941, a fatal crash occurred involving one of R.A.F. Chivenor's aircraft, which for some reason, is not recorded in the Operations Record Book. Beaufort L.4458 arrived at R.A.F. Chivenor on 15 January 1941, to be allocated to No. 3 (C) O.T.U.. On 25 April 1941, it was being flown by Sgt C. C. N. BAILEY, with his crew of three; plus, one other member of aircrew, possibly an instructor. The aircraft suffered an engine failure, and crash-landed in the parish of Ashford, near Barnstaple, North Devon.¹⁶ It appears that the scene of the crash was Ash Barton, about one and half miles north of R.A.F. Chivenor. Ash Barton is next to Furze Park Woods, with Luscott Farm nearby. The crew of five survived, but one of the Wireless Operators/Air Gunners, Douglas PROUDMAN, was critically injured. He died on 27 April 1941, at the North Devon Infirmary in Barnstaple. 635790 F/Sgt PROUDMAN had served previously with No. 248 Squadron, and is believed to have been an instructor at No. 3 (C) O.T.U.. His body was taken to his home-town of Devizes in Wiltshire, where he is buried in Section N.C., Grave 94 of the town's cemetery.

27 April 1941 was an important day for several pilots and aircrew, as No. 3 Beaufort and No. 3 Anson course both finished. No. 5 Beaufort, and No. 5 Anson/Blenheim courses, commenced on the same day. Apart from the five aircraft that arrived at R.A.F. Chivenor on 28 April 1941, that date was marked by the loss of another pilot from No. 4 Beaufort course. 904436 Sgt E. MORRISON took off from R.A.F. Chivenor for a night flying training sortie in Beaufort L.9933. His aircraft crashed near Ash Barton, north of Braunton, killing Sgt MORRISON, the sole occupant of the aircraft instantly. His funeral was held at 15.00 hours on 2 May at St. Augustine's Church at Heanton Punchardon. There was an Air Raid Red Warning at 10.40 hours, with the All Clear issued at 10.58 hours.

R.A.F. Chivenor was attacked for the third occasion at 01.25 hours on 6 May and lasted about twelve minutes. It was a fine, fairly bright, moonlit night with cloud cover above 5,000 feet. One unidentified aircraft, approached R.A.F. Chivenor from the East, circled the airfield at about 2,000 feet, then dived and released a stick of small bombs from approximately south to north in the centre of the airfield. One aircraft was set alight. Further enemy aircraft then approached from the West, straddling the aerodrome and two hangers with a stick of bombs from west to east. Another aircraft flew over the airfield from north to south and released three large bombs which fell just outside the station on the south side. There were no casualties. The Air Raid Warning Red was issued at 23.25 hours, and the All Clear given at 02.08 hours. Six Ansons and one Blenheim were damaged in the attack, but none of the Ansons were damaged beyond repair.

There was an Air Raid Message Red at 23.46 hours, with the station being attacked by an enemy aircraft at 01.54 hours on 12 May. The attack was mounted by only one aircraft, which crossed the aerodrome, circled, and then dived towards the base dropping a stick of twelve bombs, some of which fell into the River Taw. There were no casualties, and only very slight damage. The All Clear was sounded at 05.04 hours.

¹⁶ See: <http://www.rafcommands.com/archive/00271.php> WATKINS Op. Cit. p.160 gives the location of the crash landing as 15 miles north of Ashburton, in south Devon, which is incorrect.

Circumstances of the Crash

At 15.00 hours, on 15 May 1941, Anson N.9817 took off from R.A.F. Chivenor with two pilots aboard to undertake a practice flight, 'under the hood'. This entailed flying in daylight but erecting a hood inside the cockpit that restricted visibility and replicated conditions similar to those of night flying. The two pilots were:

918435	Sgt D. W. ROSE, R.A.F.V.R.	Pilot (u/t)
952604	Sgt J. C. G. McGUFFIE, R.A.F.V.R.	Pilot (u/t)

At about 15.20 hours, the pilots lost control of the Anson, which stalled and crashed at Westaway Cross, Pilton, Barnstaple. This location is about one mile north of Barnstaple, on the main Barnstaple to Ilfracombe road opposite the entrance to the current North Devon District Hospital.¹⁷ The aircraft appears to have been flying from east to west, as it crashed across the road coming to rest against the boundary wall of Westaway House. The occupants were in their garden with friends at the time of the crash, with some debris landing in the garden.

A personal account of the incident has been provided by Mike COATS, whose father witnessed the crash and recounted his experiences to his son.

Dad was working on Tutsall farmhouse with his friend Johnny GAMMON. They both saw the Anson training plane come down, the engine cut out after a low droning noise. The plane came down at a steep angle and hit the boundary wall of the May family who lived beyond. Tragically a council worker, Sid PRATT who resided at Milltown, was killed. Mr PRATT worked for the council, and at the time, and that day was tasked with cleaning the gutters from Lynton Cross to Barnstaple. It was bad luck that he was coming to the end of his run at New Road that particular day. He was also Stone deaf, and he was unable to hear the plane as it fell out of the sky. My Dad and his mate after witnessing the crash ran down to the site, as they got there a large crowd had already gathered. Apparently, the plane was carrying ammunition, and bullets were flying everywhere in the flames. My Aunt Clara at the time was babysitting for the MAY family, and that particular day, had left the baby in their garden, yards beyond the wall, just as the plane crashed into it. Fortunately, the baby survived, with no injuries.

The two occupants of the aircraft died instantly in the crash.¹⁸ In addition, sixty-eight-year-old Mr. Sidney Thomas PRATT, who was working at the scene mending the road, was seriously injured. He was taken to the North Devon Infirmary in Barnstaple, where he died later the same day.

¹⁷ Air Ministry Casualty File AIR 81/6452

¹⁸ WATKINS Op Cit p.160 and <http://www.rafcommands.com/forum/showthread.php?2852-Unaccounted-airmen-15-5-1941>

The funeral service for twenty-two-year-old Sergeant Donald Weston ROSE was held on 20 May 1941, with his body buried in Row M, Grave 10, of St. Augustine's churchyard, at Heanton Punchardon near Braunton. The body of Sergeant John Cooper Gunn McGUFFIE was taken to Largs Cemetery in Ayrshire, where he is buried in Section Y, Grave 321. Mr PRATT was buried in the churchyard of St. Michael and All Angels at Marwood, near Braunton.

Anson N.9817 was one a batch of three-hundred and fifty Mk. I aircraft, built at Newton Heath, Manchester, between September 1939 and March 1940. It was allocated from new to No. 6 Service Flying Training School, from where it was re-allocated to No. 608 (North Riding) Squadron. This aircraft arrived at No. 3 (C) O.T.U., based at R.A.F. Chivenor on 28 April 1941.¹⁹ At the time of the crash, the airframe had flown a total of five-hundred and twenty-three hours. The aircraft was partially burnt out, and was assessed as Category E.²⁰

Court of Inquiry

A Court of Inquiry was convened, which found that the aircraft was too badly smashed to allow any technical theory as to the reason for the accident to be advanced. It was determined that the two pilots had died performing unauthorised aerobatics while on a practice flight to the north of the town of Barnstaple. They determined that Sgt ROSE was the pilot of the aircraft at the time of the crash. The Form 1180 states that Sgt McGUFFIE was the First Pilot for this flight. This was because McGUFFIE had forty-two hours solo on the Anson, whereas ROSE only had three hours. The totals for dual flying were twenty-four hours for McGUFFIE, and two hours for ROSE. In terms of flying other types of aircraft, ROSE had flown sixty-three hours solo and McGUFFIE thirty-five. ROSE had clocked fifty-one hours dual flying on other types, with McGUFFIE having twenty-seven hours dual instruction.

Both pilots had trained together, attending No. 12 Flying Training School at R.A.F. Grantham. They graduated with their Flying Badges ('Wings') on 18 January 1941, so had been qualified as pilots for just four months at the time of their deaths. Both had practiced for ten hours on a Link Trainer, and McGUFFIE had fifteen hours instrument flying, while ROSE had just seven hours.

Accidents Investigation Branch

The Accidents Investigation Branch (A.I.B.) of the Air Ministry investigated this accident, completing a short report on the incident. The A.I.B. had no technical evidence due to interference with the wreckage.

¹⁹ STURTIVANT, R.C. *The Anson File* (Tonbridge, Air Britain Publication, 1988) p.71 and 65. The aircraft was fitted with two Cheetah IX engines, 139276 and 139301. The both engines were fitted on 23 April 1941, with the port engine having run for 509 hours, and the starboard engine for 491 hours.

²⁰ Category E meant that the aircraft was written off.

Their report states:

On 15.5.41, Sgts ROSE and McGUFFIE were detailed to do one hour's flying under the hood in Anson N.9817. Sgt ROSE was the pilot at the time of the accident, which occurred after the aircraft had been seen doing two 'falling leaves' followed by a stall turn at about 1,000 feet.

That the accident was due to loss of control while low flying and not carrying out the exercise ordered. 23 May 1941, letter to all O.T.U's in the group calling for stricter measures for enforcing flying discipline.²¹

The Air Crew and Civilian

918435 Sergeant Donald Weston ROSE, R.A.F.V.R.

Donald Weston ROSE was born on 11 April 1919, in Gosport, Hampshire. His father, Percival, was a shipwright at H.M. Dockyard, Portsmouth, and the family lived at 44, St. Edward's Road, Gosport. His service number indicates that he enlisted at R.A.F. Uxbridge sometime after September 1939. After enlisting in the Royal Air Force, ROSE would have spent eight weeks at an Initial Training School before moving on to an Elementary Flying Training School. Pilots under training spent ten weeks at this stage of their training learning the basic skills required of a pilot. This was generally in the classroom and flying De Havilland Tiger Moth biplanes. At an appropriate time determined by an instructor, the pupil pilot would fly their first solo flight.

Leading Aircraftman (LAC) ROSE was posted to No. 12 Flying Training School at R.A.F. Grantham. Here it appears that he trained with and met John Mc GUFFIE. This was the longest stage of their training and involved more classroom work on a range of subjects, including navigation and the principles of flight. This Flying Training School trained pilots for multi-engine aircraft, so ROSE and McGUFFIE would have been taught to fly the Avro Anson or Airspeed Oxford. LAC ROSE graduated with his Flying Badge ('Wings') on 18 January 1941 and was promoted to the rank of Temporary Sergeant with effect from the same date.

For the last stage of his training prior to an operational posting, Sgt ROSE was posted to No. 3 (C) O.T.U. at R.A.F. Chivenor. At the time of his death, his father was living at 41, Sydney Road, Gosport.

952604 Sergeant John Cooper Gunn McGUFFIE, R.A.F.V.R.

John Cooper Gunn McGUFFIE was twenty-one years of age when he died, having been born in Largs, Ayrshire, on 20 August 1919.

²¹ [Accident Report N.9817 TNA AVIA 15/19](#)

He was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel McGUFFIE, of Newton Mearns, who formerly lived at 20, Panmure Street, Barnhill, Dundee.²² Mr McGUFFIE was well known in the insurance industry in Dundee, and he had been the resident inspector of the Scottish Widows' Fund and Life Assurance Society for many years.

John was educated at the Grove Academy, and after leaving school, he gained employment in the Dundee office of the Northern Assurance Company Ltd. His service number indicates that he enlisted sometime after September 1939 at R.A.F. Cardington, in Bedfordshire. Sgt McGUFFIE was buried in Largs Cemetery on 20 May 1941, five days after his death. In addition, he is commemorated on the Largs War Memorial. At the time of his death, his father lived at 8, Service Road, Kilmarnock.

Sidney Thomas PRATT, Civilian

Sidney Thomas PRATT was a son of the late Henry and Jane PRATT, of Headley, Epsom, Surrey. He was born in March 1873 in Headley, Surrey, and was still living at No. 9, The Village, with his family in 1891. His father was a general labourer, as was his older brother, Harry, but Sidney was employed as a domestic servant. He moved to North Devon, where he met Mary Helen QUICK, who was born and raised in the village of Marwood, near Barnstaple. They married on 22 June 1907 in the Independent Chapel in Barnstaple. Sidney was shown as being employed as a stableman, and Mary is shown as a spinster.

Sidney and Mary lived in Woodford Bungalow, Milltown, Marwood, Barnstaple, where their first child, Florry was born in 1909. Their son, Ernest, was born in 1912. Milltown is a small hamlet on the B3230, from Barnstaple to Ilfracombe, but lies in the parish of Marwood, which is about one and half miles away. In the 1911 census, Sidney lists his occupation as 'General Labourer (Highway)'. He was still living at Woodtown at the time of his death, and he left an estate of £380 to his wife, Mary. Mary died on 15 August 1964, and Florry in 2001.

During the Second World War, Ernest (or Ernie as he was known) joined the Royal Army Ordnance Corps and he became an artificer or a mechanic. He was taken prisoner at St. Valerie-en-Caux on 12 June 1940, when the 51st (Highland) Infantry Division and supporting troops were forced to surrender to German forces. He was detained in prisoner of war camps in Germany, which is where he heard of his father's death. He wrote a couple of notes to his mother following this news, which are included in the photographs section of this booklet. In October 1942, Ernie PRATT was transferred to the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and he was released on 1 May 1945. Ernie married Ellen ROBINS in 1950, who was a widow, who had a daughter and three sons from her first marriage. One of Ellen's sons died in the Korean War. Judy VINE, Ellen's daughter, has kindly provided some information on her step-father and his father.²³

²² See: <https://www.dundee.gov.uk/roh/990.htm>

²³ The author wishes to thank Claire VINE, who is Judy's daughter, who kindly provided the information on behalf of her mother.

Conclusions

The loss of Anson N.9817 cannot be glossed over as anything other than pilot error, probably borne out of youthful exuberance, and exacerbated by lack of experience. The 'falling leaves' referred to in the report is an aerobatic manoeuvre where an aircraft enters a wing level stall, which begins to induce a spin. This is counter-acted by use of the rudder, so that the aircraft side-slips downwards, first in one direction and then another. The stall turn is another aerobatic manoeuvre, where an aircraft climbs upwards until it reaches a stall and is then turned by use of the rudder to descend during which period control is re-established of the aircraft.

As they performed these manoeuvres at a height of only 1,000 feet, Sgts ROSE and McGUFFIE left no margin for error. Coming out of these stalls, they found that they could not recover in time, and crashed near a house at Westaway Cross, mortally wounding an innocent person. Although these two young sergeants were responsible for the crash of Anson N.9817, it is difficult to blame them for their actions. They took a chance, 'got it wrong', and paid for their mistakes with their lives.

In Memoriam

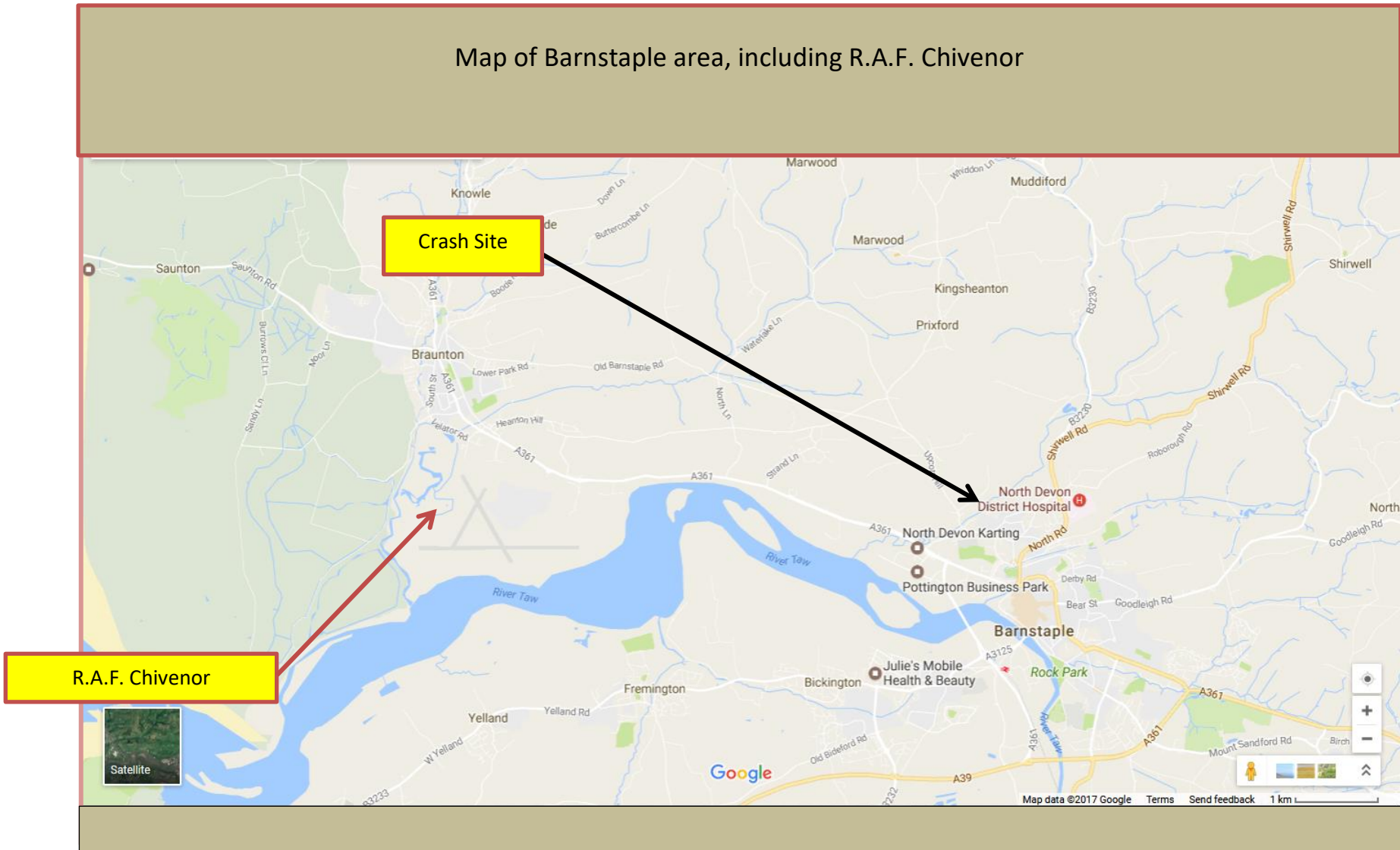
15 May 1941 – Avro Anson Mk. I – N.9817

No.	Surname	Forenames(s)	Age	Date of Death	Rank	Role	Service	Service Number	Place of Burial	Grave
1.	ROSE ²⁴	Donald Weston	22	15/05/41	Sergeant	Pilot	R.A.F.V.R.	918435	Heanton Punchardon	Row M. Grave 10.
2.	McGUFFIE	John Cooper Gunn	21	15/05/41	Sergeant	Pilot	R.A.F.V.R.	952604	Largs Cemetery	Sec. Y Grave 321.
C1.	PRATT ²⁵	Sidney Thomas	68	15/05/41	Civilian	Road Sweeper			Marwood Churchyard	

²⁴ Son of Percival Westrope and May Sophie ROSE, of Alverstoke, Hampshire.

²⁵ Son of late Henry and Jane PRATT, of Headley, Epsom, Surrey; husband of Mary Helen PRATT of Woodford Bungalow, Milltown, Muddiford, Barnstaple, Devon. Injured at Westaway Cross, Pilton, Barnstaple, died the same day at the North Devon Infirmary. He was buried at St. Michaels and All Angels Church, Marwood, Devon. Survived by wife and two children.

Map of Barnstaple area, including R.A.F. Chivenor



Map of Crash Site, Pilton, Barnstaple 15 May 1941





Left – The grave of Sgt Donald Weston ROSE, at Heanton Punchardon Cemetery

Taken by the Author (2016)

Right – The grave of Sgt John Cooper Gunn McGUFFIE at Largs Cemetery

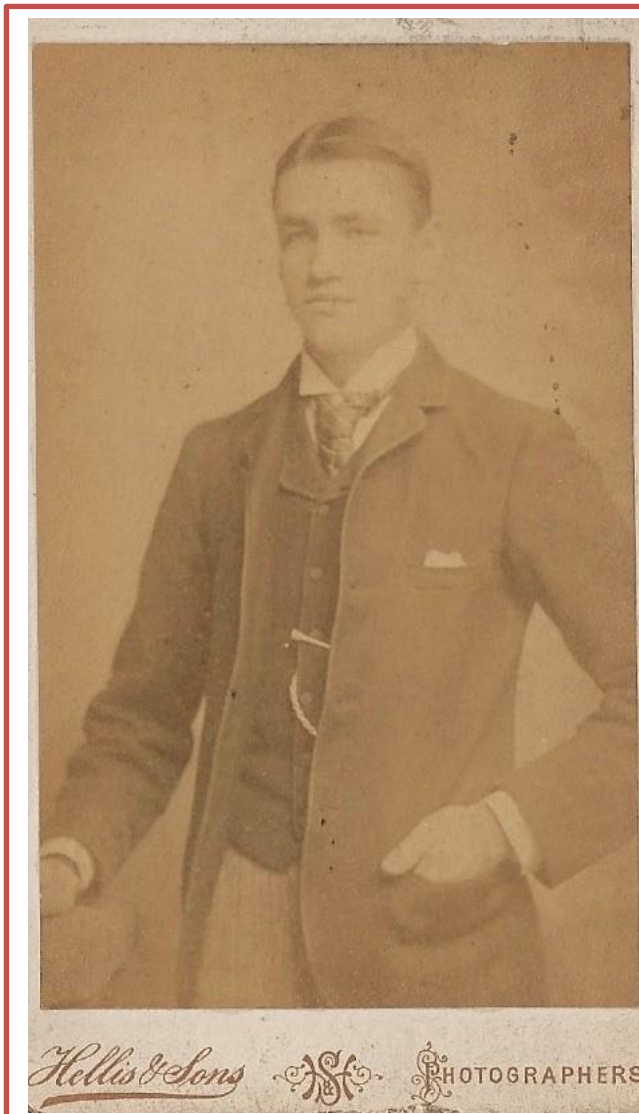
Courtesy of: The Scottish War Graves Project



Left – The grave of Sidney Thomas PRATT at Marwood.

Right – Part of the Churchyard at S. Michael and All Angels at Marwood. The PRATT family grave is centre right in this picture.

Taken by the Author (2017)



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Certified Copy of an Entry of Marriage

Pursuant to the Acto Anno Sexto et Septimo Gulielmi IV, Regis, Cap., Ixxxi, et Anno Primo Victoria Reginae cap. xxii. 61 and 62 Vic. Reg., ch. 58.

1907 Marriage Solemnized at the Independent Chapel Barnstaple in the District of Barnstaple in the County of Devon

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.
166	Twenty second June 1907	Sidney Thomas Pratt	34 Years	Bachelor	Stableman	Manwood	Henry Pratt
		Mary Helen Quick	31 Years	Spinster	—	Manwood	Thomas Quick

Married in the Independent Chapel according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Independents by *Edgar Dukesell* Minister of the Gospel

This Marriage was Solemnized between us, *Sidney Thomas Pratt* in the Presence of us, *Helen Quick* and *Mary Helen Quick* and *Ernest Quick*

I hereby Certify the above to be a True Copy of the Entry No. 166 in the Marriage Register, No. 33 for the said District of Barnstaple the said Register being legally in my custody. Witness my Hand this 22nd day of June 1907

The Statutory Fees payable for an ordinary certified copy of an entry in a Register of Births, Deaths or Marriages, if taken at the time of registration, are 7s. 7d. (including 1d. for the stamp); if taken at any time afterwards, an additional fee of 1s. is chargeable for a search extending over a period of not more than one year, and 6d. additional for every additional year.

This Certificate being signed and certified as a true copy by an officer to whose custody the original is intrusted, is admissible in evidence in any Court of Justice.

Left – Sidney PRATT as a young man.

Above & Right – The marriage certificate for Sidney PRATT and Mary QUICK on 22 June 1907. The quality of the handwriting is noteworthy.

Courtesy of: Claire VINE (Relative)

Certified Copy of an Entry of Marriage.

Pursuant to the Acto Anno Sexto et Septimo Gulielmi IV, Regis, Cap., Ixxxi, et Anno Primo Victoria Reginae cap. xxii. 61 and 62 Vic. Reg., ch. 58.

Married at the Independent Chapel Barnstaple in the District of Barnstaple in the County of Devon

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
166	Twenty second June 1907	Sidney Thomas Pratt	34 Years	Bachelor	Stableman	Manwood	Henry Pratt	Farmer Labourer
		Mary Helen Quick	31 Years	Spinster	—	Manwood	Thomas Quick	Tailor

Married in the Independent Chapel according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Independents by *Edgar Dukesell* Minister of the Gospel

This Marriage was Solemnized between us, *Sidney Thomas Pratt* in the Presence of us, *Helen Quick* and *Mary Helen Quick* and *Ernest Quick*

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This Certificate being signed and certified as a true copy by an officer to whose custody the original is intrusted, is admissible in evidence in any Court of Justice.



Above – Ernest PRATT (son of Sidney and Mary) photographed in 1939 while serving in the British Army. Ernest (or Ernie) is stood in the second row on the right.

Right – Notification to Sidney PRATT that his son Ernie, was a prisoner of war in Germany, having been captured at St. Valerie in France while serving with the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

Courtesy of: Claire VINE (Relative)

Army Form B. 104—83A.

No. R. 1263/177
(If replying, please quote above No.)

R. A. O. C. RECORDS

R. A. O. C. 4 NOV 1940
Record Office,
Edward Wood Hall Station.
London Rd. Leicester TN 11 70

SIR OR MADAM,

I have to inform you that a report has been received from the War Office to the effect that (No.) 7589396
(Rank) PRIVATE (Name) PRATT, E. E.
(Regiment) Royal Army Ordnance Corps
is a Prisoner of War, captured at ST. VALERIE, 12.6.40
Admitted to camp number STALAG XXI.B. Germany 7.7.40
Transferred from camp number STALAG VI.D.
Prisoner of War number 3400.

Should any other information be received concerning him, such information will be at once communicated to you.

Instructions as to the method of communicating with Prisoners of War can be obtained at any Post Office.

I am,
SIR OR MADAM,
Your obedient Servant,
H. Klein case Capt.
for Officer in charge of Records.

Ans. Pratt,
Millton
Muddyford
St Barnstaple, Devon.

IMPORTANT.—Any change of your address should be immediately notified to this Office. It should also be notified, if you receive information from the soldier above, that his address has been changed.

WT.30241/1250 500M. 9/39. KJL/8818 Gp.698/3 Forms/B.104—83A,6

15/10/41

Stalag XXI A
Geprüf!

Dear Mother, I have received six letters from you within the last two weeks, they were May, June, and August letters. I am very sorry to hear the way that Dad had his accident, but I am glad to hear that he did not suffer, I hope that you are alright for money, and that you and Floppy are keeping well, I also received my first letter from Bry last week, she says that she is keeping well and still working, hoping to get some more soon. I have not received any more parcels, but there is plenty of time. I have lost my farming job, we were standing in a shed out of the rain, when the farmer came along and had us sent back for not working in the rain.

it will be a change to have a rest. I have not much news, every thing is going on alright, and I am keeping quite well. We have a few fresh prisoners come in. With Love, Ernie.

Kriegsgefangenenlager Datum: 22/9/41

Dear Mother, I have just received a letter dated the 20th July and the one before that was dated the 11th March so I do not know what has happened during that time. You say that you miss Dad about the house, so I take it that he has passed away. With Love Ernie.

REGISTER FORMS FOR RECOVERED ALLIED PRISONERS OF WAR

PRATT	ERNEST	E.E.P.	BRITISH
(Surname)	(First Name)	(Initial)	(Nationality)
C.F.N.	7589396	5400	R.E.M.E.
(Rank)	(Army Serial Number)	(P.W. Number)	(Regiment) (Company)
Gen.	VIII B	5 years	XXI A
(Rank of Service)	(Prisoner Camp)	(How long)	(Previous Camp)
(General Physical Condition)			
Evacuated by Ambulance	Scratch	Truck	Air (Check One)
(Date Released)	(Date Captured)	(Location)	(Place Captured)
12/1/40		St. Malo	
(Date returned to Military Control)	Signature of Ex P.W.	E. E. Pratt	
	Signature of Control Officer	James W. Cooper	
B.E.F.	1st Lt. F.A.		
(Theater in which captured)			

Service No. 7589396 U.K. U.K.

Serial No. PRATT

Surname PRATT

Last Name E.E.P.

Initials E.E.P.

Rank C.F.N.

Regiment, Squadron, or Organization R.E.M.E.

Holder's Signature E. E. Pratt

Signature of P.W. Camp Contact Officer James W. Cooper

Issued at E.P.I.M.A.S. 12th May 1945

PRISONER OF WAR
12 MAY 1945
31

Left – Letter from Ernie to his mother in October 1941 following news of the death of his father.
 Above Top – The first note from the Prisoner of War Camp from Ernie to his mother regarding his father's death.
 Above Middle and Right – Two forms in connection with Craftsman E. PRATT release from captivity.
 Courtesy of: Claire VINE (Relative)

Bibliography and Sources

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www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk

Robert PALMER, M.A.

Published by: The Author.
